

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

JANUARY 15, 1857.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. SEWARD submitted the following

LETTERS

FROM

MR. L. BARKER.

[To accompany bill S. No. 506.]

NIAGARA FALLS, *January 5, 1857.*

DEAR SIR: By the proceedings in Congress I see that you have the honor of being chairman of a committee on steamships, in relation to casualties by fire.

It has for a long time been a matter of surprise to me that some one in or out of Congress has not recommended the use of steam for extinguishing fires on board of steamships and boats, thereby availing themselves of their own weapons for defence. Steam-pipes leading to the remote parts of the ship, connected with the boilers, with blow-cocks and turn-keys on deck, (with all hands on deck,) will enable the crew to extinguish fires, if upon the under side of ceilings, where water is unavailing.

“Philips’ fire-annihilator” divested of its steam would be entirely worthless, and its only value consists in its mode of making steam almost instantaneously. It is to be presumed that all steamships, when at sea, have steam on hand, and all that is needed to prevent destruction by fire is a few steam-pipes and blow-cocks. Entire cargoes of goods may be saved by its use; while the application of water (should the ship be finally saved) would be almost as destructive as to be consumed by the fire.

A few hundred dollars expended upon a steamship of any kind will lessen the risk more than one-half, and make certain the cure for all fires originating below deck.

Yours, respectfully,

L. BARKER.

Hon. WM. H. SEWARD.

FROM MR. J. NEWLIN.

NEW YORK, *January 7, 1857.*

RESPECTED SIR : I see that the question of the necessity of increased safety of steam-vessels from *fire* about the *boilers* and *fire room* is being agitated, and would beg the privilege of making some remarks on the subject.

From my experience in the management of steam-vessels, I am of the opinion that it is *impracticable* (not impossible) to make the boiler and fire room perfectly *fire-proof* in vessels constructed of *wood*, in the use of *metal lining* or *bulkheads*. These linings and partitions might lessen the liability of taking fire, but when fire should occur, the chances of extinguishment would be very small.

I have used, on all the boats under my charge for the past twelve years, a *cock* of about *three inches* bore in the clear, inserted in the boiler above the *water-line*, to which was attached a *pipe* running under the boiler. The means of opening and shutting the *cock* carried to a place of easy access. With this simple appliance it is impossible to kindle an uncontrollable fire in the boiler or fire room, though the room was filled with combustibles, so long as there was ordinary steam in the boiler.

It may be stated as a fact that a column of steam one inch in diameter, in a close place, will extinguish more fire than a column of water six inches.

I would respectfully recommend an amendment to the act of 1852, to the following effect :

First. Making it obligatory on *all* steam-vessels to have a steam cock attached to every boiler on board, in manner as above described, and to have the means of opening the same in some safe and easily accessible place out of the boiler and fire room ; and it might be well to be able to control this cock at two or more places remote from the boiler.

Second. On all steamers using the blower or auxiliary draught. The means of stopping the motion or operation of such blower or auxiliary draught should be outside or above the boiler and fire room, in an easily accessible place, where it could be used were the boiler and fire room on fire.

With much deference and respect, I submit the above to your consideration, deeming them essential and sufficient to meet the dangers of fire in the locality named.

Truly, your humble and obedient servant,

J. NEWTON.

Hon. WILLIAM H. SEWARD,
United States Senator.